The idea vortex

About

This document is a summary of the theory and format behind the 'Idea Vortex' developed by Jack Nunn, Director of 'Science for All'. This document has been shared in the public domain to invite discussion.

Summary of idea vortex

A way of thinking, solving problems and acting. It creates a vortex of current reality merging with ideas, meeting to change future actions. It can be self-sustaining, with problems and ideas coming to the vortex, which can also create ideas, solutions (and maybe new problems!).

Why 'vortex'

It's called a vortex as it pulls in ideas, problems around an axis of action – but that axis can be moved by the things being pulled into it – it is shaped by the things which go into it, but the existing force (angular momentum) is what pulls people in – the force of translating ideas into action – recognising the intrinsic looping-link between thought, idea, action and reality.

By adding in perceived problems or needs, people can offer solutions or get to root cause and ask why that's there, do we want to support the root cause or inhibit.

Theory

The model is an attempt to translate the ideas and principles of both critical pedagogy[1] and participatory action research[2] in a plain English model that anyone can use. It uses the 'Types of Futures' model as a way of linguistically constructing a concept of time[3].

The stages of the idea vortex

1. Invite people to share problems, needs or wants
2. Invite people to analyse the problem or need – ask
   o What is the root cause (where does this problem or need sit in a causal chain – does it cause other problems or needs?)
   o Ask which level it is most helpful or realistic to look at (for example, crops failing because of drought, a group may chose to look at local irrigation rather than climate patterns). Once a level of focus (causal factors) has been identified then-
   o Invite people to consider do they feel they should support or inhibit the causal factor(s)?
3. Invite people to try and group or organise any factors into a casual chain or groups (action/reaction) with an emphasis on imagining outcomes if certain factors were changed.
4. Invite people to offer solutions or share ideas about how to support or inhibit certain causal factors – ask 'what can be done' (at this stage it is crucial that ideas are accepted and not immediately thrown out or appraised by SMART criteria etc)
5. Ask people to look at all the solutions or ideas offered and see immediately if they could help with any of these solutions (time/expertise/skills) or know anyone who could help.
6. Ask if anyone is prepared to commit to any actions – even if that action is 'write an action plan'.

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[1] https://web.archive.org/web/20190815022200/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_pedagogy
[2] https://web.archive.org/web/20190815022210/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_action_research
[3] https://web.archive.org/web/20190815030043/http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.909.531&rep=rep1&type=pdf

The result

- It creates a network of people who know people and people willing to share ideas and work together to achieve a shared vision through action.

Advantages

- People can work towards larger shared goals to solve bigger problems.
- The process can't be controlled or influenced by one person's agenda – the power comes from decentralised collective analysis and problems solving.

How

- You can create them online (social networks/reddit/loomio) or in person.
- Universities are the natural places to nurture these things.

Next steps

This document has been shared in the public domain to invite discussion. We hope to refine and improve this process over time.

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